

New Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter, Year A, May 3, 2020

Today is fittingly called Good Shepherd Sunday. I think it has always been a favorite way to picture Jesus, namely as the Good Shepherd. For example, one of the earliest drawings we have of Jesus can be found in the catacombs in Rome c. 150 AD. Jesus is pictured as the Good Shepherd and later this picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd can also be found in other parts of the ancient world.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday St. Peter, who was the first appointed shepherd by Jesus, speaks two times – in the First and Second Readings. In the First Reading from Acts of the Apostles St. Peter ends his very first sermon by proclaiming: *“Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.”* The crowd responds: *“What are we to do?”* The answer for them and also for us is **to follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd**. In the Second Reading from the First Letter of St. Peter, which is a little later in time, St. Peter again speaks. Here even in the midst of a time of severe trial and persecution, Peter is encouraging his new flock of Christians to remain true to the Good Shepherd. They are to remember that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has already personally experienced worse sufferings than they have. And by His own words Jesus has healed them, His flock, and because of His sacrificial and loving care they are not to become wayward sheep but remain faithful members of His flock.

In our Gospel taken from the 10th Chapter of St. John’s Gospel we see Jesus portrayed in two ways. First, Jesus is pictured as the **Good Shepherd**, the one who calls His sheep by name and leads all the flock to safety and secondly He is pictured as the **Sheep Gate**.

(Because we are so urban and have little knowledge of sheep and less knowledge actually of how sheep were cared for in the time of Jesus, it is a bit hard for us to understand these images.) What we can understand is that Jesus loves us deeply in a very personal and intimate way and because of this, Jesus is willing to do whatever is necessary

to keep us from being lost or hurt. So, let us not worry about anything for our Good Shepherd will provide for us.

But to help understand these biblical images of Jesus let me describe what a shepherd did in ancient days. He would walk in front of the sheep and because they knew his voice they would follow him into a good pasture. At night, the shepherd would lead them back home to a stonewall enclosure with no gate. The shepherd himself would become the gate and sleep in the opening and thus protect them from thieves and wild animals. Since there would be more than one flock and one shepherd in this pen, each shepherd would call his sheep and the sheep would only follow the voice of the shepherd they knew.

With these images we can see how Jesus, the Good Shepherd loves and cares for us. We need to listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd in these frightening times. Remember if we do so, the Good Shepherd will provide for all our needs even when we feel scared as we are walking through the darkness of Covid-19. Jesus will protect us, feed us, comfort us and will find us if we get lost. Remember Jesus not only has a personal relationship with us but He has laid down His life for us. All we need to do is call upon Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Let me end with a few questions. How have I heard the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Do I sense the peace and calm from being under the care of the Good Shepherd? Do I pray for those who continue the work of shepherding the flock of the Lord Jesus ? And finally, how do I shepherd those who are entrusted to my care?